IN THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Previously presented) A method of operating an on-the-shelf inventory management system, the inventory management system comprising a processing system including a distributed memory and a plurality of data collection devices for collecting data from one or more store locations, the method comprising the steps of:

collecting a plurality of transaction data blocks from one or more of the data collection devices, the data blocks including point-of-sale information;

updating a table of transactional data in the memory based on certain of the data blocks, wherein the certain data blocks are associated with a reporting period; and

issuing an alert when information in the certain data blocks satisfies predetermined criteria, wherein the alert identifies an item and a store; and

receiving a response to the alert indicative of conditions of the identified item on shelf space in the identified store.

2. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 and further comprising the step of obtaining data associated with a series of reporting periods by iteratively repeating the steps of collecting, updating and issuing, wherein statistical information derived by analyzing the series is used to quantify certain of the predetermined criteria.

3. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the table includes a plurality of fields, each field characterizing aspects of one or more items for sale, and further comprising the steps of:

initializing each field in the table before the collecting step; and

when the current reporting period is over, returning to the initializing step.

4. (Canceled)

5.   (**Currently amended**) The method of claim 3, wherein the step of collecting includes:

receiving data blocks from the data collection device when a selected number of data blocks [[is]] are available; and

receiving any remaining data blocks from the data collection device at the conclusion of the reporting period.

6.   (Canceled).

7.   (Previously presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the step of issuing an alert includes:

obtaining one or more measurement numbers from information in the database;

comparing the one or more measurement numbers with existing values in the table to form difference values; and

issuing an alert command when the difference values do not fall within predetermined acceptance ranges.

8.   (Canceled)

9.   (**Currently amended**) The method of claim 7 wherein the step of issuing an alert further includes:

determining whether an alert command has been received;

when an alert command is received, determining whether the identified item has been blocked added to a blocked log;

when the identified item has not been blocked added to the blocked log, issuing the alert.

10.   (Original) The method of claim 9 wherein the alert includes a page.

11.   (Original) The method of claim 9 wherein the alert includes an e-mail.

12.   (Original) The method of claim 9 and further comprising the step of adding an identifier and a time stamp to an alert log to record the alert.

13.   (Previously presented) The method of claim 12 and further comprising the steps of:

determining whether a response to the alert has been received;

when a response to the alert is received,

identifying the sender,

determining a type of response, and

adding a record to the alert log;

determining whether the response is of a predetermined type; and

when the response is of the predetermined type, adding the identified item to a

blocked log.

14.   (Original) The method of claim 13 wherein the predetermined type includes an out-
of-stock condition.

15.   (Previously presented) The method of claim 13 and further comprising the steps of:

determining whether the alert has been received;

when the alert has been received, inspecting a shelf location that corresponds with the

identified item;

selecting a descriptor to describe a condition of the shelf location;

transmit descriptor back to the alert device; and

taking necessary corrective action.

16.   (Previously presented) The method of claim 1 and further comprising the steps of:

determining whether an alert has been received;

when an alert has been received, inspecting a shelf location that corresponds with the

identified item;

selecting a descriptor to describe a condition of the shelf location;

transmitting the descriptor back to the alert device; and

taking necessary corrective action.

17.   (Previously presented) A method of operating an on-the-shelf inventory management system, the method comprising the steps of:

measuring a number of units of an item that has been sold;

generating an alert when the number of units of the item that has been sold falls below a statistical measure of a number of units that are expected to have been sold, wherein the alert identifies the item and an associated store;

determining whether an alert has been received;

when an alert has been received, inspecting a shelf location that corresponds with the item;

selecting a descriptor to describe a condition of the shelf location;

transmitting a descriptor back to the system.

18.   (Original) The method of claim 17 and further comprising the step of taking necessary corrective action.

19.   (Previously presented) An on-the-shelf inventory management system, the system comprising an inventory management server and a plurality of data collection devices, the system providing a current reporting period table that has a number of rows, a number of columns, and a number of fields, each field having an initial value, the system comprising:

a computer having:

means for collecting a plurality of transaction data blocks;

means for constructing a temporary table having a plurality of fields that correspond with the current reporting period table, and processing the plurality of transaction data blocks to determine a calculated value for each field in the temporary table;

means for adding the calculated value for each field in the temporary table to an existing value in each corresponding field in the current reporting period table;

means for determining, for each item in the current reporting period table, if an alert condition exists, and issuing an alert when an alert condition and

means for receiving a response to the alert indicative of conditions of an item identified by the alert.

20.   (Previously presented) An on-the-shelf inventory management system, the system providing information associated with transactions in one or more retail stores, comprising:

a server for receiving transactional data related to the one or more retail stores, the server being adapted to maintain the data in a database;

a transaction processor for arranging the data into a plurality of fields and for accumulating data received in a selected time period and recording the accumulated data in a reporting table, wherein the reporting table is indexed by time period;

an alert generator for monitoring the reporting table and generating alerts based on criteria related to the accumulated data in the reporting table;

a plurality of inventory management computing devices in the one or more retail stores for generating the transactional data and transmitting the transactional data to the server; and

a plurality of electronic devices configured to receive the alerts and adapted to transmit a response to the alert, the response indicative of conditions of items on shelf space in a store.

21.   (**Currently amended**) The method of claim 20, wherein the conditions include out-of-stock ~~conditions of items include~~ conditions, missing sign conditions, blocked shelf conditions and product-to-the-back-of-the-shelf conditions.

22.   (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the response is a predetermined response and the conditions include out-of-stock conditions, missing sign conditions, blocked shelf conditions and product-to-the-back-of-the-shelf conditions.

23.   (**New**) The method of claim 7 wherein the step of issuing an alert further includes:

adding the identified item to the blocked log when the alert command is received and the identified item has not been added to the blocked log.